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New York

President:	Mr. Danforth	(United States of America)
Members:	Algeria	Mr. Baali
	Angola	Mr. Gaspar Martins
	Benin	Mr. Zinsou
	Brazil	Mr. Sardenberg
	Chile	Mr. Muñoz
	China	Mr. Zhang Yishan
	France	Mr. Duclos
	Germany	Mr. Pleuger
	Pakistan	Mr. Akram
	Philippines	Mr. Baja
	Romania	Mr. Motoc
	Russian Federation	Mr. Konuzin
	Spain	Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Thomson

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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04-60499 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.40 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, and in the absence of objection, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

I invite Mr. Roed-Larsen to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations. At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Roed-Larsen: Four days ago, a political titan passed away in a French military hospital in Paris. Three days ago, a funeral ceremony was held for Yasser Arafat in Cairo, before he was buried in Ramallah. A giant has left the world political scene. He was a giant for those who supported him and for those who opposed him, for friend and foe alike. His passing marks the end of an era.

For nearly four decades, Yasser Arafat was the leader of the Palestinian people, expressing and embodying the aspirations of his people like no other. That famous face with the trademark kaffiyeh epitomized Palestinian identity and national aspirations, even more than the Palestinian flag or the national anthem. For many, including himself, Abu Amr, the "Old Man", became one with the word Palestine. Personality and territory merged into one and became indistinguishable, a synthesis. But even more so, as a leader, he built the institutions that now are making an orderly transition possible — al-Fatah, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Palestinian Authority with its President, Prime Minister, cabinet and most of all, the democratically elected Legislative Council.

Thirty years ago, Yasser Arafat became the first representative of a non-governmental organization to speak to a plenary session of the General Assembly. One year later, in 1974, the General Assembly adopted resolution 3237 (XXIX), conferring on the PLO the status of observer in the Assembly and in other international conferences held under United Nations auspices.

Yasser Arafat was also the leader who guided the Palestinians, in 1988, to accept the principle of peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian State. He will always be remembered for doing so. President Arafat then took a giant step towards the realization of the vision of a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel, with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Tragically, he did not live to see that vision fulfilled.

Now that he has gone, both Israelis and Palestinians, and the friends of both peoples throughout the world, must make even greater efforts to bring about the peaceful realization of the Palestinian right of self-determination.

The United Nations, together with our partners in the Quartet and in the region, must continue its work to achieve the full implementation of the road map, as endorsed by the Council in its resolution 1515 (2003). Our shared goals must continue to be the realization of peace in the Middle East, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 1397 (2002), the end of the occupation that started in 1967, and the establishment of a sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state existing side by side in peace with a secure Israel. Although Yasser Arafat did not live to see the attainment of those goals, the world must continue to strive towards them.

Our deep-felt condolences are with President Arafat's wife and young daughter Zahwa. We grieve with them. Our thoughts and prayers are also with his wider family — the Palestinian people, in the hope that they will find the strength, courage and wisdom to look to the future. They must now continue to work for the fulfilment of their aspirations through peaceful means and thus benefit succeeding generations.

These are undoubtedly momentous days in the Middle East. I am glad to say that the Palestinian leadership has reacted commendably and has taken the first firm steps towards instituting a smooth transition of power, in accordance with their Basic Law. They have, by and large, successfully prevented internal unrest in the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

I am further encouraged by the great degree of coordination between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority related to the arrangements for President Arafat's burial. I am particularly pleased to note the fact that Israel allowed Palestinian security forces to bear arms and that the Government of Israel has released 145 million shekels in attached arrears. The extent and success of the coordination in recent days is reminiscent of earlier, happier days, and might herald a new beginning — a new beginning that would not be due to President Arafat's passing, but would be in spite of that very difficult situation.

As a first step, the Palestinians now need to organize and conduct free and fair elections for the presidency within sixty days, in accordance with the Basic Law. The Palestinians also need to undertake visible, sustained, targeted and effective action on the ground to halt violence and terrorist activity. Israel, during this critical time, needs to refrain from all actions undermining trust — including settlement activity — facilitate the preparations and conduct of elections, and take steps to significantly improve the humanitarian situation by lifting curfews and easing restrictions on the movement of persons and goods. All these steps have to be taken in parallel. Only then can they mutually reinforce forward motion.

The Middle East had reached a critical juncture even before the passing of President Arafat. Less than three weeks ago, the Israeli Knesset approved Prime Minister Sharon's initiative to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank. That historic decision paves the way for the evacuation of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory for the first time since the occupation began in 1967.

Amidst the remarkable events taking place in the region, I would like to look at the peace process from a different perspective today. In most of our briefings in recent months, we have concentrated on the events and developments on the ground, usually painting a gloomy picture of violence, deterioration, and crisis. Those pictures reflect the sad reality characterizing the Middle East. However, the potential of the present situation contains a perspective to change that reality. I would therefore like today to highlight the bigger picture, one that underlines how far the parties have moved in the past decade and what opportunities remain for them to settle their conflict.

For the past century, the Middle East has been one of the most persistent theatres of conflict in the world. As the members of the Council know better than any, the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the greatest enduring diplomatic challenges that the world has faced since the middle of the twentieth century. At the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lies a dispute of competing and contradictory historical narratives, collective aspirations and identities. For most of its existence, Israel has remained locked in a state of war with one or more of its neighbours, and since the creation of the refugee problem, the Palestinian people have been left in limbo, struggling to find their path to a dignified existence, self-determination and independence.

For both Israelis and Palestinians, their conflict is a deeply existential struggle. Israelis feel the conflict as a constant battle for their very survival, a struggle that needs to be seen against the background of the experience of near-extermination that occurred during the lifetime of current Israeli leaders.

Palestinians feel the struggle as a battle of resistance each and every day for their identity and against the erosion of the possibility of a future as a people. Ultimately, both sides pursue similar aspirations: self-determination, peace, security, prosperity. Both sides have had, in a sense, similar leaders — leaders of war and of peace. One of those was Yitzhak Rabin, whose death we mourned this month nine years ago and who paid with his life for having taken bold and brave steps towards peace. Another is Yasser Arafat, who led the Palestinians in war and in peace and who did not live to see peace and self-determination realized.

The aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians have long been thwarted by violence and crisis. Since September 2000, the peace process has been in reverse. Approximately 3,895 Palestinians and 983 Israelis have been killed. More than 36,620 Palestinians and 6,360 Israelis have been injured. Many of our earlier achievements have been eroded.

The violence of the past four weeks underlines a pattern that has emerged ever more clearly since September 2000, and especially over this past year: Palestinian extremists and militants organize and carry out suicide bombings and other acts of terror against Israeli civilians, as they did once again on 1 November, killing three people in Tel Aviv and wounding many more in an act of terror. Palestinian militants also fired Qassam rockets and mortar shells against cities inside Israel as well as against Israeli targets in the occupied Palestinian territory. Sadly, children are among the victims — as was the case in late June, when a 4-year-old died in a Qassam rocket attack against Sderot, or in late September, when a 2-year-old and a 4-year-old were killed by yet another Qassam rocket fired on the city. As we have stated here month after month — and I say it again — it is the Palestinian Authority's obligation under the road map and under international law to prevent all such attacks, to do its utmost to end the violence and to bring those implicated in terrorist acts to justice. Nothing can justify terror.

Israel has maintained the illegal practice of targeted assassinations, including in densely populated areas, where there is a high risk of so-called collateral damage. In yet another such extra-judicial killing, Israel assassinated a senior Hamas leader and his deputy in the Gaza Strip on 21 October. Israel must halt its resort to such targeted assassinations. Israel's military operations and incursions in the occupied Palestinian territory also raise the spectre of the disproportionate use of force and collective punishment through the destruction of civilian property and infrastructure.

Disturbingly, there is often a high death toll of civilians, especially children. On 24 and 25 October, Israel conducted a military operation in Khan Younis that left 16 Palestinians dead, among them an 11-year-old boy. On 28 October, a 9-year-old girl was hit by gunfire on her way to school in Khan Younis. On 30 October, a 12-year-old boy was shot dead in a refugee camp in the West Bank town of Jenin, where Israeli troops operated for several days from 27 October onwards.

Israel is obligated under international law and as the occupying power to protect Palestinian civilians, especially children, and to safeguard civilian property. Israel has the right to self-defence, but it must be exercised in strict adherence to international law.

The violence and terror, and the lack of mutual confidence, have reinforced the belief on both sides that they are struggling for their very survival and existence. In many ways, the opponents of peace have been defeating all those of us who desire and believe in peace. It is now time to wrest control from them and to take charge.

The need to act could not be any clearer. The Palestinian economy remains on the verge of collapse. Palestinian living conditions have declined dramatically. Already, by the end of 2001, they were worse than they had been at any time since 1967. We thought then that it could not get worse, but it has. The situation, which the World Bank earlier this year called one of the worst recessions in modern history, is threatening to take on disastrous proportions. Poverty, which is widespread, continues to increase, as does unemployment. Revenues of the Palestinian Authority continue to be far below expenditure levels. The Palestinian Authority is the primary employer of the Palestinian labour force, with a large proportion of the wider population crucially dependent on wages paid by the Authority. Continuing and expanded donor assistance will be essential to keep the Palestinian Authority afloat. Support is required urgently, especially at this difficult time in the Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian Authority remains under a great deal of pressure. However, I have been encouraged by recent developments. Compared to earlier this year, when I told the Council, in my July briefing, that the paralysis of the Palestinian Authority had become abundantly clear and that the deterioration of law and order in Palestinian areas was steadily worsening, the situation has by and large remained calm and controlled since President Arafat's departure for medical treatment in Paris and his subsequent passing.

However, the potential remains for a complete breakdown of law and order, in addition to a collapse of the fragile economy and the disintegration of the institutions of Palestinian self-rule. The exchange of fire between masked Palestinian gunmen and Abu Mazen's bodyguards, which resulted in two deaths yesterday, was a sad reminder of how fragile the situation is.

This underlines the need for immediate and sustained help. Donors should provide financial support to the Palestinian Authority. Israel should also

play its part. Closure, now fully re-imposed on the entire Palestinian territory, is the primary reason behind the economic and humanitarian crisis in the territory and therefore also an important cause of political instability.

In light of this, the ability of United Nations agencies and the international community to deliver vital humanitarian assistance and developmental programmes is now as crucial as ever. Unfortunately, access and the delivery of urgently needed humanitarian aid, particularly in Gaza, has become increasingly difficult in recent months, with serious consequences. Some positive steps to alleviate the situation have been taken recently, but they fall short of our expectations. More needs to be done.

Despite the difficult situation in the Palestinian areas, and in spite of the violence and terror, and the economic, humanitarian and political crisis, we know that it is possible to alter the reality prevailing in the Middle East. A full settlement of the conflict would contribute significantly to enhancing peace and stability in other parts of the region and, indeed, throughout the world at large. Despite the many, many difficulties, the parties are much closer to reaching that goal than our current perception would lead us to believe.

Among both Israelis and Palestinians, support for reconciliation, peace and coexistence has remained persistently high over the past decade. Indeed, what could be labelled a cultural revolution has taken place in both the Israeli and the Palestinian streets in the past 10 years. I remember very well how controversial it was only a few years ago to speak, in Israel, of a State of Palestine. As a member of the Knesset put it to me:

> "A few years ago, muttering the words 'State of Palestine' would have you thrown out of nearly every office here in the Knesset. Now you will hardly see anyone bat an eyelid."

I also remember well how unpopular it was to speak to Israelis of the 1967 borders, and it was almost inconceivable for a long time to propose the evacuation of Israeli settlements. Today, the Israeli Prime Minister has embraced the vision of ending the occupation that began in 1967, and he is the first-ever Israeli leader to initiate a large-scale uprooting of settlements in Gaza and parts of the West Bank. The political significance of breaking down those longstanding taboos in Israel should not be underestimated.

According to public opinion polls, in 1993 only a third of the Israeli public favoured the establishment of a Palestinian State. The support among Israelis for a Palestinian State grew steadily during the years of the Oslo process, reaching 50 per cent in 1997 and 56 per cent in 1999. Even the eruption of the second intifada in September 2000 did not reverse the trend. Though public support for a Palestinian State fell to 49 per cent in 2002, the presentation of the Quartet's road map in 2003 led an unprecedented 59 per cent of Israelis to favour the establishment of a Palestinian State. Similarly, a large percentage of Israelis have remained unwaveringly supportive of negotiations as a means to settle the conflict, regardless of the continuing violence. In September 2004, well more than two-thirds of Israelis supported peace negotiations and only 27.1 per cent were opposed to them. I would call those changes in public perception in Israel nothing less than a cultural revolution — a fundamental, radical and massive change of public attitudes.

On the Palestinian side, similar radical changes have occurred. In September 1993, after nearly six years of the first intifada, Palestinians had high expectations, reflected in the support of 65 per cent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for the Oslo process. An equal percentage of Palestinians anticipated the peace process to improve economic conditions in the occupied territory. Despite uncertainty and disappointment of the initial expectations during 1994, which saw support for violence among the Palestinian public rise to 57 per cent, the parallel support for the peace process never fell below 60 per cent between 1996 and 1999. By September 1999, support for the peace process stood at 75 per cent and has had majority support even over the last four years.

Those findings confirm that — although it might be difficult to see in the current conditions — much progress has been made in the years since 1993. Some 12 years ago in Oslo, we began an experiment to bring the two peoples together so they could find ways to build a common future. And much of that common future has been outlined and defined, even though we now seem far removed from completing the picture.

Israelis, Palestinians and the international community worked closely together for most of the

years of the peace process. We all collaborated closely in the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 and together saw the growth of significant Palestinian institutions — not only those of the Palestinian Authority, but also those of Palestinian civic society and those of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation. And while some of the Palestinian institutions were flawed by mismanagement and lack of transparency, some were able to deliver essential services to Palestinians and some began to carve out an independent political space for Palestinian development.

The progress was real and undeniable. Much remained to be achieved — and obviously still does — but much was achieved, much more than we often realize now that so much has been destroyed.

One of the strongest and most persistent criticisms of the Oslo process is that it did not define the end goal; it did not define where we would be at the end of the process. That, it is often argued — with some justification — left the process vulnerable to interruptions, to misinterpretation and to failures of vision along the road. True, every suicide bombing that hit an Israeli city in 1994, in 1995 and in the years after that; the closure regime restricting Palestinian movement in the West Bank and Gaza and curtailing Palestinian employment in Israel; and the continuous and unimpeded growth of Israeli settlements all contributed to derailing the vulnerable process further and further. And so the momentum was gradually lost.

But the criticism of the Oslo process for its gradualist approach and for deferring decisions on the most difficult issues until later is desktop philosophizing. There was no other way back then but to proceed cautiously and gradually. Nowadays, we tend to overlook the progress that was actually made. Today, the international community has, through the road map, which builds on the earlier agreements, a clear and shared vision of how to end the occupation that began in 1967. We have a clear vision to settle the conflict through the realization of the two-State vision and the coexistence, side by side, of Israel and an independent, sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestine in peace and security. In 1993, that vision was blurry at best. At the time, it was impossible to define end goals that would have come close to satisfying the concerns of both peoples. Had we sought to start at the end, we would not have started at all.

At the time, gradualism, the step-by-step approach, was a choice of necessity. And the tactic of gradualism was successful, up to 1999. It is perhaps the greatest achievement of the Oslo process that it changed fundamentals, perceptions, attitudes and ideologies on both sides. Over the years, support for the peace process grew steadily on both sides as both peoples saw an alternative to confrontation and the possibility of a shared future. The now more than 10-year-old peace process initiated the fundamental change of attitudes, which, again, has made possible not only a definition of the end goal, but also a rallying of majority popular support for it on both sides.

In 2000, 70 per cent of Israelis expressed their support for the Oslo process, whilst nearly 60 per cent of Palestinians continued supporting the Oslo formula. As economic and social conditions in the West Bank and Gaza radically improved, together with the levels of optimism, levels of violence showed a steady decline. For example, whilst the number of Israelis killed in suicide attacks averaged 40 to 50 a year in the three years immediately following the Oslo agreement, 1997 saw that number drop to 24, and in 1998 and 1999 there were no Israelis killed by such attacks.

Continuous improvement of economic and social conditions in both Israel and the West Bank and Gaza accompanied and provided the foundations for that progress and optimism. The Israeli economy boomed, with new peaks in foreign direct investment year after year, with a fundamental shift from isolation to an economy deeply integrated into world markets — a shift that was made possible only by the peace process, as some argue. Though economic growth started slowing after 1996, it picked up again from 1999 on, with very strong growth during the first nine months of 2000 that contributed to an overall growth rate of 7.5 per cent that year. The Palestinian economy, initially suffering from the creation of new boundaries between areas under self-government and those still under Israeli occupation, likewise witnessed unprecedented growth. By 1996 — and from then on for a period of three years — sustained growth characterized the Palestinian economy. Poverty declined from about 50 per cent to 21 per cent by September 2000. Unemployment fell from about 30 per cent in 1997 to 13.3 per cent in 1999. Growth in real incomes averaged around 9 per cent from 1997 to 1999. The Palestinian Authority's fiscal vitality improved significantly to

achieve a small surplus in 1999, no longer necessitating external budgetary support.

But by that time, trust between Israelis and Palestinians was faltering and with it, the economic, social and political progress came to a halt. We are all too familiar with the economic and humanitarian crisis that emerged in the Palestinian territory. But even the much more advanced Israeli economy slid into deep crisis and has not yet recovered from it. Indeed, it is doubtful that a full recovery is possible under conditions of continued conflict.

As trust began to falter, dialogue began to stall. The development of Palestinian institutions to support the trust, the dialogue and the economic progress began to reverse. After September 2000, it was the use of force and terror that truly shattered the remaining confidence of those Israelis and Palestinians who believed in the will of the other to make real progress towards a common future. With that, much of our hope evaporated.

Israel's resort to force, extrajudicial killings, frequent military operations and incursions, the temporary reoccupation of areas under Palestinian self-rule, house demolitions, closures, movement restrictions, the continued establishment of outposts and expansion of settlements, construction of Israel's barrier, and the confinement of the Palestinian President to his compound for more than two years — all those elements contributed to convince Palestinians that Israel did not truly believe in peace and did not really want peace.

The resort to violence and terror perpetrated indiscriminately against civilians; failure to rein in the terror; incitement and the continued commitment of some to eradicate the State of Israel and liberate all of historic Palestine; failure to institute reform and adopt appropriate standards of governance, transparency and accountability: those factors led Israelis to believe that the Palestinians were not ready for peace and were not willing to share peaceful coexistence.

Neither side felt it had a partner for peace.

Israeli soldier and politician Moshe Dayan once said, "If you want to make peace, you don't talk to your friends; you talk to your enemies". More than four years of violence, deterioration and crisis have taken their toll. If the past four years have taught us anything, it is that terror, morally reprehensible as it is, does not bring a leader and a people closer to the attainment of their goals. It moves them further away from the fulfilment of their aspirations. A military solution to the conflict does not exist. Sooner or later, a new beginning will have to be made: a beginning that leaves behind violence and terror and embraces peaceful means. The demise of the Oslo process is not irrevocable. The principles underlying it remain valid.

I believe very firmly in those principles. Let us, for a moment, consider three fundamental alternatives of how to conceptualize peace in the Middle East. These are the one-State solution, the multiple-State solution — where the rest of historic Palestine is split and handed to neighbouring States — and the two-State solution. Both the one-State solution and the multiple-State solution can lead nowhere but to perpetual conflict in the region. They fail to satisfy the essential aspirations of either one of the two parties. A one-State solution might accommodate many fundamental Palestinian desires, but it fails to meet the essential requirement of Israelis to maintain their self-determination and sovereignty. A multiple-State solution, on the other hand, might meet many basic ambitions of Israelis, but it would fail to satisfy the core aspiration of the Palestinian people, namely, self-determination and sovereignty.

Only the two-State solution can offer us a viable way out of the conflict. The international community has long agreed that only a settlement of the conflict that offers both Israelis and Palestinians the satisfaction of their fundamental desire for self-determination, independence and security within agreed-upon and internationally recognized borders can achieve sustainable and enduring peace in the Middle East. Such lasting peace will only be possible if ultimately the occupation that began in 1967 ends and leads to the coexistence of two States, Israel and Palestine, side by side in peace and security. That goal can only be reached over the negotiating table and in full cooperation with the international community and the Quartet, and not through acts of terror, violence or subjugation. That is the vision that was embraced by United States President George W. Bush in his 24 June 2002 speech, that was promulgated in the Arab peace initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah as adopted by the Arab Summit in Beirut, and that the Security Council endorsed in resolution 1397 (2002). That vision remains valid as our common goal.

Allow me to elaborate further. The basic principles that underlay the Oslo process remain valid and alive today. They are: the fundamental principle of land for peace, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the end of occupation; rejection of violence and terrorism; the need for security for both parties; a fair and agreed-upon solution to the plight of refugees; and Israel's legitimate right to self-defence and to exist in security. Those principles guide the vision shared by the Council, President Bush and the Arab League, and inform and steer the key instrument we have developed and worked to implement over the past year — the road map — which was presented to Israelis and Palestinians in 2003 and was endorsed by the Council in resolution 1515 (2003).

Israel must be provided with full recognition and with real and permanent guarantees of its own security, in the form of freedom from attack and from the threat of attack. The Palestinians must be provided with real and permanent independence, in the form of a viable and secure Palestinian State established on lands occupied by Israel during the 1967 war and with economic control over its own borders. As part of the process leading to those goals, it is necessary, as the road map emphasizes, to remove Israeli settlements, reform Palestinian institutions and restore the Palestinian economy and infrastructure.

While the principles remain unchanged, the mechanics for realizing them in practice are now very different from the early days of the Oslo process. Most, if not all, agree that we must now start at the end. We require consensus about where the conflict must end. That must be agreed up front, before anything else can be done. Having agreed on the end state, we can implement its elements in an orderly sequence, but we must know where we are going. In that context, it is of great importance that we clearly define our end goal beyond the vision that we already have, while we continue to walk the road we have mapped out ahead of us.

Secondly, far from the principle of internationally facilitated bilateralism that characterized the Oslo process, at least in its early years, the principles for an end of conflict can only be introduced by the international community, as is done through the road map. The details will have to be negotiated and implemented by the parties, but we can help them and outline the end of the road that we have mapped out for them.

Thirdly, the international community must guarantee any and all agreements, and those guarantees must be firm and real. Israel must know that if it reaches final agreement, the agreement is truly final and there will be no more conflict or even the threat of conflict — no more claims and no more rejection. The Palestinians must know that provisional steps to reach an agreement will actually get there, that their gains will not be reversed and that they can begin to plan for, and count on, their own future.

There has been much talk about the demise of the road map and about the incapacity of the Quartet in the face of the continuing economic and political crisis. By contrast, I believe that the Quartet retains its validity and relevance thanks to its unique combination of legitimacy, political strength and financial and economic power represented by the Russian Federation, the European Union, the United States and the United Nations. Through consensus, it will be the most efficient and operational tool of the international community, in the best interest of the parties and of peace. The road map, as the plan accepted by both parties to find a way out of the current violence, remains equally valid. In fact, the twin mechanisms of the road map and the Quartet are now more important than ever. The implementation of the road map remains our primary goal at this stage.

As we have repeatedly stated, the implementation of Prime Minister Sharon's withdrawal initiative and the evacuation of settlements in the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank offer an opportunity to revive the peace process, and, indeed, to move rapidly towards the realization of the principles I just talked about. For that to happen, as we have long maintained, the Israeli redeployment needs to be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and the Quartet; be full and complete and lead to the end of the occupation of Gaza; be accompanied by similar steps in the West Bank; and be fully consistent with the road map. That is not just possible; it is a realistic expectation.

In his speech preceding the historic Knesset vote on his initiative, Prime Minister Sharon stated clearly and unequivocally that he supported the end of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and "the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside the State of Israel". He also reiterated clearly that he remained

"willing to make painful compromises in order to put an end to this ongoing and malignant conflict between those who struggle over this land" and to do the "utmost in order to bring peace".

Prime Minister Sharon's statements, as well as the Knesset vote, make clear that this is a unique opportunity for the international community to engage actively in order to revive the peace process. In many ways, Mr. Sharon's initiative aims to go further than earlier Israeli Prime Ministers dared to propose. It represents nothing less than a programmatic continuation of the Oslo process, which saw a number of phases and stages of Israeli redeployment. In this sense, the implementation of Israeli disengagement is nothing but a logical step to be taken along the road towards peace. It has the potential to drive the process forward significantly, if the international community and the Palestinians are actively involved and if they contribute to it.

Another logical next step is the resolution of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict on the regional level in a comprehensive manner, as envisaged in the Arab peace initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah.

On the regional level too, much more has been achieved than we realize nowadays. In an important step, Israeli troops withdrew from south Lebanon in May 2000. In June that year, the Secretary-General reported that Israel had withdrawn its forces from all Lebanese territory in accordance with resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978). The Council endorsed this conclusion in the statement by its President on 18 June 2000 (S/PRST/2000/21). The process leading up to and following the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon, the drawing by the United Nations of the so-called Blue Line — the line of withdrawal separating the State of Israel and the Lebanese Republic — and the confirmation of the complete nature of the Israeli withdrawal in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions set an important precedent for the future.

Much as on the level of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, conditions remain far from perfect. A generally tense, but relatively calm situation has prevailed along the Blue Line, with worrying exceptions to this in the form of violations from both sides of the line. Israel has carried out frequent overflights violating Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. On numerous occasions, we have called upon the Israeli authorities to cease these overflights. From the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, violations have been carried out by Hizbullah and other armed elements, posing mortal risk and, at times, causing deaths and injuries. Many of these attacks have taken place in the Shab'a farms area, which the Government of Lebanon, in contrast to the decisions and resolutions of the Security Council, continues to insist are Lebanese territory.

More recently, there have been other violations of the Blue Line. On 28 October, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) reported that Palestinian armed elements based in Lebanon launched a rocket across the Blue Line into Israeli territory, which exploded in the vicinity of Shlomi. Today, there have been reports of a similar incident, which UNIFIL is investigating at present. In a new and worrying development, on 7 November, an unmanned aerial vehicle was launched from the Lebanese side of the Blue Line and into Israeli airspace. The unmanned aerial vehicle was reported to have flown over Israeli territory before re-entering southern Lebanon and landing in the general area of Naqoura. We have repeatedly called on the Government of Lebanon to exert its authority over all its territory, in full consistence with relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 425 (1978), 426 (1978), 1310 (2000) and 1559 (2004).

On the Syrian-Israeli track, the parties repeatedly touched upon peace over the past 10 years. President Assad has repeatedly stretched out a hand towards Israel, inviting it to peace talks. Such talks could significantly contribute to stability and to an improved atmosphere in the region. However, negotiations between Israel and Syria remain suspended. The interests, however, remain unchanged. For the realization of our shared objective, the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, it is of great importance that the parties resume their negotiations. With our help, Israelis and Syrians need to act to return to the negotiation table, so as to fully implement resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) to realize peace in the region.

The Council is the primary reference point for peace in the Middle East. Its decisions set the basic parameters for peace and the process towards achieving it in the region. I have referred to many of the Council's resolutions in my briefing today. Resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002)

outline the fundamental principles for peace in the Middle East, which I spoke about earlier: the principle of land for peace, the principle of ending the occupation and the principle of a two-State vision to realize peace in the region. Resolution 1515 (2003) outlines the road that we jointly mapped out and continue to follow in our pursuit of peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Those resolutions provide the foundations for peace in the Middle East. The Council's continued engagement will have to guide any revitalization of the peace process in the region. Indeed, there is no future for peace in the Middle East without this Council, and there cannot be.

In my briefing today, I have sought to shed a different light on the reality in the Middle East. I do not wish to pretend that the reality prevailing in the Middle East is not grim. I do wish to emphasize today that hope remains and opportunity remains.

Today's briefing is also the last I am giving in my capacity as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the region. I would not like to end it without thanking all the members of this Council for the hospitality they have extended and for their unfaltering support during my years of service. It has always been a pleasure, and indeed an honour, to be the Council's guest.

At long last, I would also like to use this occasion to thank my staff and all the United Nations organizations in the region for their dedication and hard work in the name of peace, reconciliation and development in the Middle East. I would also like to express my gratitude and appreciation for the persistent support and cooperation of the Governments of my mission area — Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon — as well as of the representatives of the Palestinian people. I would like to thank and express my deep appreciation for our colleagues of the other Quartet members and the wider international community, which has supported and assisted us in words and deeds and in pecuniary terms.

In the spirit of the briefing I have delivered today, a briefing that emphasizes opportunity in difficult times rather than focusing only on deterioration and crisis, allow me to end on a quotation taken from Tennyson's *Ulysses*:

> "Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
> We are not now that strength which in the old days
> Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
> One equal temper of heroic hearts,
> Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

May our strength in will remain, to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield the peace in the Middle East.

The President: I thank Mr. Roed-Larsen for his comprehensive briefing. I would like to congratulate him on his tenure as envoy. He has been engaged on the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations for more than a decade, and his service and dedication are recognized by all concerned.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussions on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.